

ESTABLISHED 1659
CITY OF NORWICH
CONNECTICUT

NORWICH YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES
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Testimony February 21, 2015 5pm Appropriations Secondary Education Subcommittee:
Chairs Sen. Cathy Osten, Sen. Paul Formica, Senator Somers, Rep. Toni Walker, Melissa Ziobron, Subcommittee Chairwoman Gayle Slossberg and Subcommittee Chairman Chris Rosario.

I am writing this testimony to strongly urge you to restore the cuts made in the Governor's upcoming budget to Youth Service Bureaus across the state.

I am the Coordinator of Norwich Youth Services and have been working for my community for 32 years because I believe in the power of Youth Service Bureaus to touch kids' lives and make a difference in their community.

Over the past 3 years Youth Service Bureaus have already sustained significant cuts resulting in a decrease in our ability to serve the youth and families of our communities, as we are required to do by state mandate. And now the potential for further cuts exists in the Governor's new proposed budget. In addition, despite these cuts, proposals continue to be made in the areas of Mental Health and Juvenile Justice which will place increased responsibility on local community supports such as Youth Service Bureau counseling programs and Juvenile Review Boards, all while reducing state funding rather than increasing it.

There are currently 101 Youth Service Bureaus in Connecticut serving over 144 communities and the majority of YSBs, like Norwich, are part of municipal government. It is imperative that funding to Youth Service Bureaus remain constant and that the competitive pool proposal not be approved by the state Legislature. YSBs already divert youth under 18 years of age from the Juvenile Justice System. With more "raise the age" legislation being discussed, the proposed closing of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, and the elimination of Family with Service Needs referrals for truancy and defiance of school rules to juvenile court, YSBs will continue to play a key role in expanding and providing diversion programs to meet the needs of our most at-risk youth. The Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee is working very hard to reform CT's Juvenile Justice System and they are wisely focused on the YSB and JRB system as the vehicles of change for this reform. Additional support and resources will be needed at the local level and although there is no recommendation for new money to be allocated, there should be a discussion on repurposing or reallocation of existing funding to local communities for these programs.

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Sixty-five percent of the funds that support YSBs are from the local municipalities', as they are designed to be community partnerships. YSBs report combined available funding of \$29,709,937, which we have leveraged beyond the basic state grants. This is a huge "Bang for the Buck"! Reducing our very small basic grant reduces our capacity to leverage other monies. In Norwich, we were able to use our State cost sharing grant to leverage an additional \$434,565 in State, federal and private grants.

In 1978, Public Act 78-183 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) established Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs). A YSB is defined as an agency operated directly by one or more municipalities, or a private agency designated to act as an agent of one or more municipalities, for the purpose **of evaluating, planning, coordinating and implementing services, including prevention and intervention programs for delinquent, pre-delinquent, pregnant, young parents and troubled youth .**

The statute further states that YSBs **shall** be the coordinating unit of community-based services to provide a comprehensive delivery of prevention and intervention, treatment and follow-up services. (See C.G.S. 10-19m).

We have been working diligently to reduce juvenile arrests and divert youngsters from the juvenile justice and we have been increasingly successful across the board. In the last five years, the YSBs have increased their services in many areas. Most notable is a doubling of the number served in after-school programs and a 134 percent increase in the number served in positive youth development programs.

In conclusion, please be cautious about dismantling this well working, cost effective service delivery system. The "Bang for the Buck" is truly unique. Our municipality can ill afford this cut!

Sincerely,
Angelo Callis, LMFT
Coordinator, NYFS

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